

A JOHNSONIAN NEWS LETTER

Vol. II, No. 1 Address communications to J. L. Clifford Jan., 1942
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Penna.

If numbers in attendance are any criterion, the 18th century luncheon at Indianapolis was a rousing success. Ninety-three people crowded into the second floor of the "Canary Cottage" at noon on Dec. 29. The food was good--or at least we did not hear too many complaints--and the genial, friendly atmosphere seemed infectious.

No program of speeches had been arranged, but after the dessert R. D. Havens gave a splendid short talk. As he so convincingly pointed out, the 18th century need never again be on the defensive. At Harvard and elsewhere in the old days our field was often held in disdain and was continually slighted. But the great interest shown in 18th century research all over this country certainly indicates that the tide has turned. Ours is now one of the most vital and active fields of literary study.

The obvious success of the luncheon prompts us to plan another like it for next year. Moreover, many of our members have expressed a wish that the program of the meetings could be so arranged that Groups VII and VIII would come on the same day -- preferably with Group VII the last period in the morning and Group VIII the first in the afternoon. With such a schedule the luncheon might be fitted in between the two meetings. One day of the meetings might thus be made into an 18th century "Three Ring Circus", and members who could arrange to attend part of the time only might concentrate on this day. The matter is now being discussed with the general program committee, and an announcement of further plans will be included in the next News Letter.

A STRANGE COINCIDENCE

On the morning of Dec. 30, the day of the Group VIII meeting, the Indianapolis Star announced the acquisition by the John Herron Art Museum of that city of a portrait of Joseph Baretta painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The newspaper further added:

"It appears that Baretta was a favorite subject of Sir Joshua, for the master repeated the portrait more than once. The one at the Herron is in grisaille, an oil painting in monochrome. It has a brownish tinge, which Wilber D. Peat, director, believes to be brought about by the use of raw umber, black and white, and a little burnt umber. Students of this painting declare it to be the stock portrait from which the others in oils were painted."

Perhaps some of our readers can furnish more information about the history of this famous painting.

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GROUP ELECTIONS

At the meetings in Indianapolis the following officers were elected for the ensuing year. The Chairman of Group VII, Knox Chandler (Vanderbilt); Secretary, J. M. Osborn (Yale). The Chairman of Group VIII, Dixon Wecter (UCLA); Secretary, J.L.Clifford (Lehigh).

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Mimeographed lists of new topics of research undertaken by M.L.A. members, as reported to the editor of Work in Progress, are available. Address requests to the News Letter. Additions or changes may also still be sent in.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND

The Johnson Club was scheduled to meet for luncheon in London on December 11 to hear a short talk by D. Nichol Smith on Dr. Johnson's poetry.

A. L. Reade (Blundellsands, Liverpool) writes of reading the early numbers of our News Letter with great interest: "they serve a very useful purpose in keeping Johnsonian and other eighteenth century students in touch with one another's doings. It was interesting to find the quotations from my own letter, giving particulars of the damage done to us in the raid."

C. J. Sisson has recently been named by Lord Harmsworth as one of the Governors of the Johnson House Trust.

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AN APOLOGY

Every editor has his headaches, and may be forgiven for making the mistake of occasionally passing them on to unsuspecting readers. We take back the one we gave to R. P. Bond (N.C.) last December, when we announced that because of ill health he had given up the compilation of the annual bibliography for the Philological Quarterly. He says illness was not the reason, and asks for a "jolly recantation". Thus we hasten to pass on the good news that the report of his illness was vastly exaggerated.

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AN ANNOUNCEMENT

R. P. Bond (N.C.) is at work on a critical bibliography of books, articles, notes, and important reviews relating to British newspapers and periodicals of the 17th and 18th centuries. He is collaborating in this research with Mrs. Robert Weed, the Univ. of North

Carolina Ass't Reference Librarian. Considerable progress has already been made, and a grant received from the M.L.A. Any out-of-the-way references which scholars may contribute will be gratefully received.

LISTS OF SUBSCRIBERS

Our readers may remember that in the October issue of the News Letter is was proposed that as much aid as possible be given to Sarah L. C. Clapp (La St. Normal) in her project of cataloging 18th century books containing lists of subscribers.

A. L. Reade in his recent letter, while referring to his interest in the News Letter and what we are doing, discusses this project in some detail: "I was particularly pleased to see the suggestion to compile a list of eighteenth century books containing lists of subscribers. I have long thought what a useful thing it would be if some one would take up this project. My idea was that all the names of the subscribers themselves should be indexed, but probably this would be too big a thing to attempt, especially as the same person would often have to appear several times in the index owing to the descriptions being different in different lists. Without much research it would frequently be very hard to distinguish and identify the subscribers, with changes in address and title as the dates advanced, especially as there would be much under-description and even inaccuracy to hamper the progress of the person courageous enough to tackle the job. But now that Sarah L. C. Clapp has made a good start it will be possible soon to estimate what actually indexing the names would involve."

Several scholars in this country (including Phil Gove and E. G. Cox) have already offered to help in the project. Will others who have suggestions of ways and means, or who can send on lists of books containing subscribers' lists, please get in touch with those in charge?

AUCTION SALES

The second part of the library of W. H. Woodin, sold at Parke-Bernet Galleries Jan. 6-8, contains a number of items of interest to students of 19th century drama. Of most importance, perhaps, are a number of extra-illustrated sets -- notably Fitzgerald's The Knebels and Campbell's Life of Mrs. Siddons, together expanded to 15 vols. by the insertion of portraits, caricatures, rare playbills and autograph letters. This is the set personally grangerized by the late A. M. Broadley. Other autographs of Mrs. Siddons and the Knebels may be found in an 8 vol. set of Mrs. Charles Mathews' Memoirs of Charles Mathews, Comedian.

Interesting Blake items are included in the sale of January 14 at the Parke-Bernet Galleries.

The Dauber & Pine catalogue No. 236, January 1942, lists a very interesting collection of contemporary tracts (58 items bound in 12 volumes) on the French Revolution, referring principally to the Edmund Burke-Thomas Paine controversy. The catalogue list itself is worth keeping as a record of the ephemeral tracts of the period.

Also included in this catalogue are a number of Johnsonian books from the library of the late R. B. Adam.

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A QUERY

E. G. Cox (U. of Wash.) writes: "I think Johnsonians could well use a Who's Who and a What's What of Boswell. I suppose Smith-Dampier's book [Who's Who in Boswell] stands in the way of the former, incomplete as it is, but I know of nothing that would compete with the latter. What I have in mind is short biographical accounts of every personage mentioned in Boswell and descriptions of every publication cited. I for one would welcome the notice of such a project being in hand.

"I have come across two titles that have aroused my curiosity. Perhaps some member of Group VIII can inform me where they can be found.

"Poems by a Young Nobleman... particularly the State of England and the once flourishing City of London, in a Letter from an American Traveller dated from the Ruinous Portico of St. Paul's in the year, 2199, to a Friend settled in Boston, the Metropolis of the Western Empire, also sundry Fugitive Pieces.' First edition. 4to, 55 pp. London, 1780.

"The Life and Extraordinary Adventures, the Perils and Critical Escapes of Timothy Ginnadrake, that Child of Checquer'd Fortune. 3 vols. in one thk. 12mo. ('scarce Bath item'). Bath, R. Cruttwell, 1771."

Can any of our readers describe these in more detail?

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1942 COMMEMORATIONS

In our last we asked for suggestions of special events which should be celebrated in the coming year. Henry Pettit (Colorado) reminds us that 1942 is "the 200th anniversary of the baptism of Young's Complaint; or Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality, as well as of the commemoration of Richard Bentley's death and the capitulation of Walpole." Pettit adds that he will be glad to exhibit his collection of Young at the University of Colorado next summer, when "summer visitors are as thick as flies." We hope we may be one of the flies, and will keep other prospective or willing travelers who possibly may be near Boulder next summer posted as to the details of the exhibit.

But what of other celebrations? Fielding's Joseph Andrews might surely be made the "raison d'être" for an exhibition; and the death of Reynolds in 1792 provides another. In a world with its eyes turned to new horrors every day, it is our duty to hold fast to our literary heritage.

DR. JOHNSON'S POETRY

With the appearance of D. Nichol Smith and E.L. McAdam's superb edition of The Poems of Samuel Johnson, the old argument concerning his place as a poet is again pertinent. Has Boswell's preoccupation with his friend's conversation obscured the genuine merit of Johnson's creative work? Or is Johnson's poetry pedestrian and uninspired? Certainly there is a wide diversity of opinion among critics.

The usual text book verdict in our country is not particularly favorable. For instance, Lieder, Lovett and Root, in British Poetry and Prose say: "His two poems, London (1738) and the Vanity of Human Wishes (1749), are vigorous, but not brilliant, satires modeled on those of Juvenal." Shepard and Wood, in English Prose and Poetry 1600-1800, insist: "Johnson was not a great poet; The Vanity of Human Wishes lacks many of the finest qualities of poetry." And Woods, Watt and Anderson, in The Literature of England describe his style as that of the neo-classical masters who preceded him, "without their vivacity and charm. Johnson's work is heavy and awkward by comparison."

And yet on the other side we have T. S. Eliot in his edition of London and the Vanity of Human Wishes, writing: "To my mind the latter is the finer poem; but both of them seem to me to be among the greatest verse Satires of the English or any other language; and so far as comparison is justifiable, I do not think that Juvenal, his model, is any better. They are purer satire than anything of Dryden or Pope, nearer in spirit to the Latin."

Moreover, a recent critic in the Nov. 14 number of The Spectator has this to say: "Johnson is by no means to be disposed of as a minor poet inferior to Dryden or even to Goldsmith. His is a unique, authentic voice, and his genius is evident in his poems, and not only in his prose and his conversation."

How can we reconcile these con-

flicting points of view? Will Johnson as a creative artist have to be reassessed? Think over the problem and write in your opinions. It might be interesting to air both sides in our columns.

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FROM CHINA TO PERU

The question of the extent to which old phrases were current in another age is one of some interest to students of language and literature. As an example, Flora M. Handley (Paducah Junior College) would like to know how general was the use of the term "from China to Peru", which appears in the opening lines of The Vanity of Human Wishes.

Nichol Smith and McAdam list, as samples, Sir William Temple's "in all Nations from China to Peru" (Of Poetry, 1690), and the elder Thomas Warton's "All human Race, from China to Peru" (Poems, 1748). Flora M. Handley has noticed a quotation of Temple in Blount's De Re Poetica (1694), and another use of the phrase in the first volume of Charles Gildon's Complete Art of Poetry.

Had the phrase become so much a staple of ordinary language to represent the ends of the earth that it was recognized as such by contemporary readers? Possibly the frequency of its use might be some indication. Will our readers send in any other examples that they chance to see?

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A 17TH CENTURY NEWS LETTER

Imitation, they say, is the sincerest form of flattery, and we are delighted to hear that the 17th century group now plan to issue a News Letter similar to ours. Jim Osborn (Yale) will be editor-in-chief, with J. Milton French (Rutgers) and Jim McManaway (Folger) as co-editors. Anyone who wishes to receive a copy of the first number of this publication, whenever it appears, should write to any of the editors.